NEIGHBORHOOD

ORGANIZING

TOOLKIT

The City of Riverside, California
Office of Neighborhoods
2001

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Organizing Your Neighborhood

I.   **What is a Neighborhood Organization?**
A Neighborhood Organization is a group of neighbors who organize, formally or informally, to help improve the quality of life in their neighborhood.

II.   **Why organize?**
1. To build relationships with neighbors.
2. To create a unified voice at City Hall.
3. To strengthen communication within the neighborhood.
4. To accomplish neighborhood goals most effectively.

III.   **Getting Organized:**
1. If an organization already exists, (i.e. Neighborhood Watch, Neighborhood Advisory Committee, informal block club) great! These organizations should not be ignored, but are often "single focus" groups that come together for a defined purpose and can cover very large geographic areas. These existing groups can offer the opportunity for a range of partnerships with existing leadership and resources.
2. If there are no existing neighborhood organizations or if you choose to form a group more tailored to your neighborhood, begin by identifying two or three neighbors willing to help you as part of an "organization committee." Meet with this committee to discuss:
   - Selection of a temporary group leader.
   - Suggested topics for agenda/goals of an organization. Residents need an issue to organize around such a s neighborhood clean-up, tree problems, crime, disaster preparedness, traffic, etc. Avoid being a narrow in focus, as the group will soon loose interest and begin to dwindle.
   - Set a place and time for a neighborhood meeting. (Centrally located home, community center, or school. A time during the week just after dinner works best.)
   - Distribute fliers. (See sample, page 11)
   - Talk to neighbors one-on-one and, if possible, informally survey them. Survey would include things like their ideas, concerns, suggestions for addressing concerns, convenient times to hold meetings, how frequently to meet, special social events, projects.
   - Identify other prospective leaders in your neighborhood and get them involved.
   - Decide on temporary neighborhood boundaries and select possible name or names for your neighborhood organization/group to present at the first meeting. This is for your first few meetings and may change over time.
   - Be sure to plan refreshments! People like to be fed!
   - If you need some coaching, check out the 15 minute video "Running Good Meetings" from the Office of Neighborhoods and view it before holding your first meeting or ask the Office of Neighborhoods to help plan and attend your first meeting too!

IV.   **First Meeting**

1. Supplies
   - Agenda (See sample 1st meeting agenda, page 12; sample later meeting agenda page 13)
   - Sign-in sheet

- Name tags
- Refreshments

2. Temporary group leader moderates the first meeting.
    - Go around the room and make introductions (where they live, kids, etc.)
    - Tell why core group came together
    - Discuss functions of a neighborhood organization
    - Discuss organizational structure (Chairperson, recording secretary, street captains, other)

3. Selection of Chairperson

4. Discuss neighborhood issues
    - Solicit ideas, concerns from group.
    - Suggest social events or projects the neighborhood can sponsor or be involved in.
    - Select street captains or block captains for communication at street level.
    - Form committees regarding the above and report back at next meeting. Sub-committees may include: Goals, projects, welcome to new neighbors, membership, newsletter, and issue resolution, code compliance, education
    - Decide on next meeting date, time, and place.
    - SOCIAL TIME: provide refreshments and time to mingle before or after the meeting. (Having refreshments available as people arrive is probably best.)

By roughly following these guidelines, organizational structure will be in place. A means of communication will be set and a sense of leadership and organization will also begin. Structure, leadership, and organization are important to ensure a cohesive and proactive organization. Organizing your neighborhood is a process of self-reliance. It is an avenue for networking with neighbors, making friends, watching out for each other and enhancing the quality of life for everyone in your neighborhood.

Last but not least: Fill out the Neighborhood Organization registration form on the next page and mail or fax it to the City of Riverside's Office of Neighborhoods. They will be happy to assist you in answering any questions or helping you set up your first meeting.

♦

In the following pages, please find materials that will facilitate the organization of your neighborhood organization. These materials include:
- Information on developing a work plan
- Information on developing ideas and working with volunteers
- Operating procedures
- Sample bylaws
- Agenda and newsletter formats along with a telephone tree
- A map of the neighborhoods in the City of Riverside
- Information on the City of Riverside's Neighborhood Matching Grant program
- Information on the Riverside Neighborhood Partnership

Keep your rules and procedures loose and inclusive. Don't be afraid to request assistance and…

…Best of Luck!

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION REGISTRATION

Please type or print the following information:

Organization Name: _____

Contact Person: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City, Zip Code: _____

Telephone Info. _____(H)_____(W)

E-mail: _____

What is your organization's organization/structure? (i.e. officers, committees, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

What are the boundaries of your neighborhood organization?

North_____

West _____

East_____

South_____

Approximately how many households are represented by your organization?_____

_____

What is the meeting schedule of your organization?_____

_____

Does your organization have or plan to have written by laws? _____(Y) _____(N)

Does your organization produce or plan to produce a newsletter? _____(Y) _____(N)

If so, how often? _____

Thank you for your input. Please fax or mail this form to:

City of Riverside/Office of Neighborhoods
3900 Main Street, 6th floor
Riverside, CA 92522
Fax: (909) 826-2591

Generating Ideas

There are unlimited activity options for neighborhood organizations. The following are suggested ways of generating ideas that will assure participation of everyone!

Brainstorming

This is the best way to generate as many creative ideas as possible. It encourages people to invent new possibilities without concern for practicality or appropriateness. It is often the seed for that new, great plan of action!

1. Have participants state all their ideas that might be possible solutions to your particular problem. These do not have to be well thought out or standard ideas. Anything goes!
2. Write each idea on a blackboard or large piece of paper posted at the front of the room.
3. Don't discuss the idea. That comes later.
4. Don't judge the idea. All ideas are welcome, even those that seem crazy or impossible.
5. The wilder the better. Be really creative. Sometimes the best idea comes from the most outlandish.
6. After all ideas are stated, go back and discuss each idea. Don't dismiss ideas without discussing their merits.
7. Prioritize ideas, then analyze.

The Slip Technique

Give everyone 5-8 slips of paper. Have them write their ideas on these slips. Collect the slips and sort them into piles based on frequency of occurrence, feasibility or category. Write the ideas on your blackboard or poster paper. Discuss these ideas. Feel free to be creative with the ideas proposed.

Round Robin

Often, very creative, thinking people are too shy to offer an opinion. The best ideas never emerge unless encouraged by the group. A round robin encourages participation from all members.

Whenever a question arises or you want to generate new ideas, each person is asked to give an opinion. Go around the room and have all members offer suggestions. This provides quiet members with an opportunity to participate and prevents the more vocal individuals from dominating the group. Encourage new ideas, and never criticize a suggestion.

Again, as in brainstorming, all ideas—no matter how silly they seem—are welcome. After each member has a chance to speak, discuss the pros and cons of all ideas proposed.

Developing A Work Plan

It is helpful for organizations to develop an annual work plan. Meeting goals and planning events, recruiting volunteers and strengthening the organization will be easier if you take some time to outline your expectations and objections and then make a plan for meeting those goals.

Developing a work plan can help you to decide which issues/projects are most important to your neighborhood. There are many ways to address neighborhood issues. The more open you are to finding solutions, the more successful your group will be in meeting your goals. Be creative and open to new ideas

as you plan your work and ask for assistance in getting answers to your questions by contacting the Office of Neighborhoods at City Hall.

You should also make a work plan for individual projects to help everyone stay focused and on target. Here are some questions to answer in developing a work plan:

1. What is the purpose of doing this project? If this is an annual work plan, review the purpose of the organization, and then define goals for the year.
2. Is there a need for it?
3. What resources are available to help the neighborhood organization meet these goals? (Check with the Office of Neighborhoods at City Hall.)
4. Has any other neighborhood organization tried this activity? Can they be contacted for help? (Check with the Office of Neighborhoods at City Hall.)
5. What are the tasks involved for the project?
6. How much time will be needed?
7. Will money be needed to do this? Does the neighborhood organization have the funds? How can you raise money? Check out the City of Riverside Neighborhood Matching Grant program information in the toolkit.
8. Are enough volunteers available to do the work?

Be realistic in setting goals, and accomplishment will grow!

Recruiting New Members

Help! The energy level of your neighborhood organization has sunk to a new low, and while you have successfully completed your latest community project, there are still lots more work to be done.

Groups may initially attract members through well-publicized meetings on issues that concern many or projects that involve lots of people. If your group is in the public eye, it will certainly boost membership. After the publicity dies away and the problem is solved, active members may disappear.

Finding new members is crucial to keeping neighborhood organizations alive. While many people appreciate what the group is doing for their neighborhood, they may not attend meetings or even come in direct contact with your neighborhood organization.

Neighborhood organizations often inadvertently restrict their numbers by having membership forms and sign up sheets only at meetings. In order to maximize your membership potential, the group should come out of the closet and into the public's eye. Be everywhere neighbors are. **Undertake a membership drive that directly reaches every household within your boundaries.**

1. *Have volunteers go door to door calling on their neighbors.* This can be a weeklong or one-day blitz. Consider having a membership drive and then sponsoring a party for volunteers where they can have fun and share experiences later that same day.
2. *Arm volunteers with printed materials to encourage the residents to get involved.* This can be a simple letter from the group's Chair that explains your particular neighborhood organization along with details of upcoming activities. Materials may also include information on municipal services and programs available in the area. Also, volunteers should carry membership forms with them and offer both immediate and mail-in membership opportunities.
3. *Neighborhoods can develop a block leader network as a foundation for a membership campaign as well as other activities.* Block leaders can pass out flyers and newsletters, welcome new residents, serve as a

conduit for specific problems on the block, and place volunteers in activities. Work with organized Block Watches.

4. *Members can also be found at community gatherings.* Sponsor a booth at a community festival or event. This is a great opportunity to talk to people in your area. Remember, have information and membership sign-up sheets at your booth.

Keeping New Members

Getting new members is only half the battle. The other half is keeping them involved. For every member who is active in the organization, there are probably two who would be involved if they were properly motivated. The following ideas can be useful.

1. *Help members find a place in the organization.*   Not everyone is a self-starter. Many will offer to help but have no idea where to begin. Develop a list of volunteer activities that includes a job description and approximate time commitment for each task.
2. *Welcome new people.* Officers and board members should watch out for new faces and welcome them assertively. Each new member or guest should be introduced to someone who lives near them or who shares a similar interest. Have an official "greeter" at each meeting.
3. *Avoid the appearance of cliques.* New members who see the same people running every project will feel excluded and may not return. Appoint people who are not part of the core group or steering committee to leadership roles.
4. *Welcome new ideas and input.*   This is often difficult for people who long have been involved in the organization and are more knowledgeable than newcomers are. However, people coming into a situation for the first time are able to see things in a new light and can offer new solutions to old problems. They just might have the answer that you have been seeking!
5. *Organize meetings.* Busy people will not attend meetings or involve themselves in organizations they consider to be a waste of time. Have a written agenda before each meeting and stick to it.
6. *Maintain membership records.* Keep a file that lists members' names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, family member names, occupation, special talents, concerns and areas of interest.
7. *Have fun.* The work of the neighborhood organization doesn't need to be boring and drudgery. Sponsor parties and celebrations to get to know your neighbors better. Have events that appeal to all, including children.

Volunteer Burnout

Volunteers are special people who give their time and energy without receiving money in return. But without a paycheck to keep someone coming to meetings time after time, there must be other enticements. Volunteers remain active with organizations they feel are contributing positively to the community. But volunteers also remain active when they are recognized for the effort they make within that organization.

To prevent volunteer burnout, the positive feeling one has must remain high in spite of the many hours devoted to the work involved. This is especially true in neighborhood organizations, which often demand great commitment from their workers. Here are some insight into the causes of volunteer burnout and ways to prevent your organization members from succumbing.

1. **Why do people burn out?**
   - The organization is lacking in clear goals and direction.
   - There is too much work to be done. People are afraid to say "no," thinking that it won't get done otherwise.

- There is a popular notion that if your work for a public interest organization (such as your neighborhood organization); you have to give selflessly for the cause. People see it as a measure of their worth.
- There are often few rewards or recognition for a job well done in volunteer organizations.
- All work and no play makes everyone tired and burned out!
- Too few people are involved.

2. Tips for burnout prevention

- Set realistic objectives that meet the organization's purpose and goals. It helps to have job descriptions or task outlines so people know what they are getting themselves into and what is expected of them.
- Different people are able to handle different amounts and types of work. Recognize different abilities and tolerance levels in handling out work assignments. Don't let one person take on everything and then burn out. Get new members involved.
- Remind people that the quality of their work is what's important, not the quantity.
- Recognize people for a job well done. You can verbally give thanks to people at meetings or develop an award system. This could be a certificate of appreciation, a gift given to a member who has worked hard for the group or a yearly award potluck where members are publicly recognized. Nominate volunteers for recognition by the community.
- Organize fun events for your members. Creating a social network of friends and neighbors can provide support and also give people an opportunity to have a good time together.

3. Do's and Don'ts of working with volunteers

Do's
- Involve each member in each step or organizing.
- Invite all residents within the boundaries to be part of the group.
- Be realistic about what the neighborhood organization can do.
    - ❖ How much time is needed?
    - ❖ How many people are needed for this project?
    - ❖ What other projects are underway? Is it feasible to take on a new responsibility?
- Bring all activities to discussion and vote before the full membership commits to a new project.

Don'ts
- Have one person or small groups make decisions for the entire group.
- Try to do everything yourself. The leadership of the neighborhood organization is not the neighborhood organization.
- Drop projects without a good reason. Make sure everyone knows why the project is being dropped.
- Scare off new members by asking them to volunteer for life. Start small.

STANDING RULES OR OPERATING PROCEDURES

Many neighborhood organizations find it helpful to adopt "standing rules" or "operating procedures" separate from the bylaws. These rules generally may be changed more easily than bylaws may be amended. The purpose of such rules is to have agreement of the members about how to conduct meetings and other activities. Such rules should never be in conflict with the bylaws – they should address more detailed procedures than are covered in the bylaws. The key concept of standing rules or operating procedures is that they reflect the desires of the current board or member and are changed when the desires/needs of the group change. The following is a sample of some very simple standing rules for all meetings:

- One person speaks at a time

- Speak from your own experience

- No put-downs of self or others

- No cross talk (i.e. no side conversations or interrupting the speaker to dispute points).

Some groups include a list of the committees established for the current year in their standing rules. They may also describe the method for selection of committee chairs (i.e. Does the board chair appoint committee chairs or do committee members elect their own chair?). The rules may also incorporate detailed descriptions of board, committees, and committee chair responsibilities.

While all the matters described above could be described in bylaws, including them in standing rules instead of the bylaws helps communicate to current members of the group that these are their rules, representing their choices. This prevents the problem of bylaw bog-down by many volunteer groups. Because bylaws are designed to be the major, long-term governing document, the process for amending them is designed to assure careful consideration. Bylaws that are overly detailed in describing operating procedures go out of date quickly as board and membership composition shifts. Many groups don't have time or choose to use time to amend the bylaws and allow procedures to vary from those detailed in the bylaws. If the group keeps operating procedures out of the bylaws and changes them easily, it can maintain compliance more easily and have the advantage of clear written rules as a shared basis for operations.

SAMPLE

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION BY-LAWS

ARTICLE I – NAME

The parties involved shall choose the name of the organization.

ARTICLE II – PURPOSE

The purpose of this organization is to achieve and maintain decent and wholesome living conditions in the City of Riverside; assist persons residing in the specific neighborhood to work together for the good of their neighborhood; and provide a non-partisan organization which will benefit this neighborhood and this city through worthwhile programs.

ARTICLE III – MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Membership in this organization shall be open only to persons who reside or own property in the neighborhood boundaries.

Section 2. The neighborhood boundaries are the interior of the streets that border the neighborhood.

Section 3. The organization also may enroll honorary members, but these members may not vote on matters before this organization.

ARTICLE IV – ANNUAL MEETINGS

During the first meeting of the calendar year, a meeting of this organization shall be convened for the purpose of electing officers. This meeting shall also be a regular meeting of the organization for other business.

ARTICLE V – OFFICERS

Section 1. The officers of the neighborhood organization shall consist of Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary/Treasurer.

Section 2. The officers shall be elected at the first annual meeting from a slate prepared by the Nominating Committee, as well as from any additional nominations from the floor. The persons receiving the highest number of votes for each office shall be elected. Those elected shall serve until the next election.

Section 3. No officer shall serve more than three (3) consecutive terms in the same office.

Section 4. In case of a vacancy in office other than that of Chairperson, the vacancy shall be filled by election at a subsequent regular meeting of the organization.

Section 5. Officers may be removed for cause, including violation of the by-laws or dereliction of duty, by a majority of two-thirds of the voters at a regular meeting of the organization, provided that the officer to be removed has been notified in writing of the proposed removal at least thirty (30) days before the meeting.

ARTICLE VI – DUTIES OF OFFICERS

Section 1. The duties of the Chairperson shall be to preside over all meetings of the organization, to call special meetings, to appoint committee chairpersons and to be or appoint the spokesperson for the organization to local government, the press, or other neighborhood organizations.

Section 2. The duties of the Vice-Chairperson shall be to preside over meetings of the organization in the absence of the Chairperson, and to succeed to the office of Chairperson in the event of a vacancy in that position.

Section 3. The duties of the Secretary/Treasurer shall be to keep accurate records of all meetings, to make them available, to keep a list of all members, and to assist in preparing any correspondence which may received by the organization, to disburse funds as directed at a regular or properly called meeting of the organization, to keep proper financial records, and to make regular reports of the organization's financial status.

ARTICLE VII - MEETINGS

Section 1. The regular meeting of the organization shall be held quarterly. The time and place are to be designated by the Chairperson.

Section 2. Special meetings may be called by the Chairperson or by petition of ten (10) or more members. Such meetings may act on any business proper to the organization, provided that written notice of the meeting has gone out to all members at least ten (10) days before the meeting date.

ARTICLE VIII – COMMITTEES AND PROGRAMS

Section 1. Committees and programs of this organization shall be established by majority vote of members present at a meeting of the organization.

Section 2. Committee members and chairpersons shall be appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the chairperson.

ARTICLE IX – PROCEDURE

Unless the meeting has adopted some other procedure, all meetings of this organization are governed by guidelines of Robert's Rules of Order.

ARTICLE X - AMENDMENTS

The by-laws of this organization may be amended at any meeting, provided that the proposed amendments have been sent to all members prior the meeting at which they are to be considered.

President   Vice President   Secretary/Treasurer

_____   _____   _____
Name   Name   Name

Neighborhood Organization Meeting

Date:_____

Time: _____

Location:_____

Hosted by:_____

Phone Contact:_____

RSVP by:_____

AGENDA ITEM(s)

1.

2.

3.

4.

Neighborhood Organization Meeting

1st Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome   Temporary Chair

2. Introductions   Group

3. What is a Neighborhood Organization?   Temporary Chair
    a. Functions
    b. Organization

4. Selection of Chairperson and Recorder   Temporary Chair

5. Problems/Concerns   Chair
    a. Identify
    b. Prioritize

6. Suggested Name for Neighborhood Organization   Chair

7. *Establish 2nd Meeting date and location   Chair

8. Adjournment   Chair

*Next meeting (2nd) within three weeks of the 1st meeting date.

California Avenue Block Club

July 17, 2001
Agenda

1.   WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS   Mr. Bowen/members

2.   GUEST SPEAKER

3.   SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS
      A. Neighborhood Watch Committee   Mrs. Reed
      B. Hospitality Committee   Mrs. Conerly
      C. Clean-up/Code Compliance Committee   Mrs. Beverly
      D. Neighborhood Activities Committee   Mr. Bowen

5.   OLD BUSINESS
      A. Block Party Plans
      B. The Problem House: What are we going to do?

6.   NEW BUSINESS
      A. Block Beautification Project   Mrs. Beverly
      B. Safety Lighting Project   Mr. Young

7.   OTHER BUSINESS

8.   NEXT MEETING/ADJOURNMENT   Chair

Remember we start on time! For more information please call Mr. Bowen at (310) 622-3620.

Neighborhood Newsletter

Neighborhood News Briefs and Announcements

SAMPLE

Applause!
"Neighborhood Recognition Bulletin"

Neighborhood

Red Alert!

Issue:

Meeting Information

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Phone Contact: _____

SAMPLE
Neighborhood Phone Tree